Misc. Curtom 1811

Disciples of Christ.*

J. H. GARRISON.

The religious body most generally designated by this name, though often in the South and West called also the "Christian Church" or "Church of Christ," had its origin in the western part of Pennsylvania, in the early part of the present century, under the labors of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. Hence they have sometimes been called Campbellites—a name, however, which they repudiate, being opposed to all party or sectarian names.

ORIGIN.—In September, 1809, Thomas Campbell, a minister in the Seceders' branch of the Presbyterian Church, who migrated from North Ireland in 1807, being grieved by the bitterness of party spirit among Christians of different denominations, issued a "Declaration and Address," deploring the divided state of the Church and the evils resulting therefrom, and urging as the only remedy for this state of things a complete restoration of primitive, Apostolic Christianity—its faith, its doctrine, its ordinances and its life—and the consequent rejection of all creeds or confessions of faith which stood in the way of such return to the ancient order of things. An association was formed, called "The Christian Association of Washington" (Pa.), for the purpose of promoting the principles set forth in this new Declaration of Independence. About this time Alexander Campbell, son of Thomas Campbell, arrived on the scene, fresh from his studies at Glasgow University, Scotland, being then in his twenty-first year, and having but recently dedicated his life to the ministry. He threw himself heartily into the new movement, and by his ability, learning and force of character soon became its recognized leader. It was not the intention of the Campbells at first to form a distinct religious body, but to so leaven the churches with the principles they advocated as to gradually effect the needed reforms. Failing, however, to find hospitality or even tolerance

for their plea within the fellowship of any of the denominations, they found themselves compelled, by the necessities of the case, to assume an independent position. Accordingly the Brush Run Church was organized on the 4th day of May, 1811, being the first congregation formed by the new movement.

Basis of Union.—In assuming an independent position the Reformers, as they were then called, did not cease their plea for Christian union, which they believed it their special mission to promote. Hence, in forming the first church they were careful not to include anything in the terms of fellowship which the Scriptures did not expressly warrant. A favorite motto at this time was, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent we are silent." Under this rule, first enunciated in the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell, they felt compelled to surrender some tenets and practices which they had hitherto held as binding, and to adopt others which they had heretofore disregarded. Having, however, repudiated the authority of human creeds, they felt free to make such changes as would bring them into strictest harmony with the Word of God and enable them the more effectively to plead for union on a divine basis. In yielding the practice of infant baptism because they could find no Scriptural authority for it, and in adopting immersion as the proper form of baptism, because the New Testament seemed to clearly teach that such was the original practice, they found themselves so nearly in accord with the Baptists as to be received into one of their associations, and, for a time, co-operated with them. But it soon developed that the principles of restoration held by the Campbells and their coadjutors were too sweeping for a majority of the Baptists, and the relation was discontinued, though many Baptists embraced the principles of the Disciples and went with them. Thus the impracticability of putting new wine into old bottles was once more demonstrated. Henceforth new congregations were formed on the simple New Testament basis. All who gave

credible evidence of faith in Jesus Christ were, upon confessing Him, baptized and received into the fellowship of the church, being asked only to take Christ as their leader and the New Testament as their guide.

Cardinal Principles.—Aside from the great fundamental truths which the Disciples of Christ hold in common with all evangelical Christians, the following are some of their characteristic principles:

1. The Church of Christ is intentionally and constitutionally one; and all divisions which mar this unity are contrary to the will of God and should be healed.

2. As these divisions resulted from a *departure* from the New Testament Christianity, the remedy for them is the *restoration* of the Gospel in its purity.

3. This restoration involves the surrender of all human formulations of doctrine, as authoritative bases of church fellowship,and the acceptance of the Bible alone as the rule of faith and practice, and the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, by Simon Peter (Matt. 16: 16) as the creed of the Church; the exchange of all party names for Scriptural names, and the restoration of the ordinances to their original meaning and place—baptism being the burial in water of a penitent believer who has died to sin, and the Lord's Supper being a memorial feast to be observed each first day of the week, as the central act of worship.

4. The faith which justifies and saves has Christ, not dogma, for its object, and is a vitalizing force which issues in practical righteousness and leads to a life of obedience; and not an orthodox set of notions about God.

The polity of the Disciples is congregational, the local officers consisting of elders and deacons, besides a minister or pastor, who may be one of the elders. They combine in District, State and National organizations for missionary work, but have no general ecclesiastical body for legislative purposes.

Numerical Strength.—The growth of the Disciples has been phenomenal. Beginning with a single congregation of about 30 members in 1811, they numbered at the death of

Mr. Campbell, in 1866, over 300,000. The latest statistics show the number of churches in the United States to be 9,823, with a membership of 1,019,967; number of Sunday-schools 7,129, and the whole number of scholars and teachers, 651,110; the number of ministers, 5,256. Besides these we have churches in British America, Australia, Great Britain, and a considerable membership in the foreign mission field, making the total number of churches in all lands, 10,397, with a membership of 1,060-307. The total number of Sunday-schools in all lands is 7,554, and the total number of scholars and teachers, 681,100, and 5,594 ministers.

The total valuation of church property is placed at $17,368,442. During the last missionary year (ending October 1st, 1896) the churches gave for self-support, $4,284,000; for general benevolence, $170,000; for foreign missions through our various agencies, $125,-117; for home missions, State, District and National, $300,846; total amount for missions, home and foreign, $425,963. These missionary moneys are raised under the auspices of our three national organizations, The American Christian Missionary Society, The Foreign Christian Missionary Society and the Christian Woman's Board of Missions.

Institutions of Learning.—Among their principal schools are Bethany College, Bethany, West Virginia; Kentucky University, Lexington, Ky.; Butler University, Irvington, Ind.; Drake University, Des Moines, Ia.; Hiram College, Hiram, O.; Eureka College, Eureka, Ill.; Christian University, Canton, Mo. There are, besides, many small colleges. All these make the Bible a text-book.

The principal publishing houses are, Christian Publishing Co., St. Louis, Mo., and the Standard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, O. The Disciples publish about a dozen religious weeklies, and one quarterly.

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